

The *Initiative*

AAUW
empowering women since 1881
february 2021

American Association of University Women — Rockford Area Branch



The Administration Priorities COVID



Celebrate

See the President's
Letter on page 3

The Initiative

Published by and for AAUW
Rockford Area Branch members

Editor: Sharon Boehlefeld

Submission information:

Send items to sboehlefeld@gmail.com at any time.

Deadline for the May Initiative is April 15.

Photos should be high resolution .jpg or .pdf files.

Text should be unformatted and may be included in the body of your email or as an attached Microsoft Word, Apple Pages or Google Docs file. Other formats will be returned.

Your Branch Officers

Co-Presidents—Karen Hoffman and Faye Marcus

Co-Vice-Presidents Membership—Christine Haeggquist and Karen Hoffman

Co-Vice-Presidents Programs—Judy Schultz and Jean Herro

Secretary—Erna Colborn

Treasurer—Regina Potts

Board meetings: 6:30 p.m., third Wednesday of the month via Zoom

Contact Us

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Your Branch Online

Website

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Administrator: Diana Vlase

diana21vlase@gmail.com



Calendar

Watch our website, Facebook and your email for calendar updates.

All meetings are via Zoom.

Fri Feb 5

12 noon, Let's Talk Public Policy.

Tue Feb 16

1 p.m., Book Beat

6:30 p.m., membership meeting
"Women Naturalists" [Page 5](#)

Thu Feb 25

5:30 p.m., Virtual Happy Hour [Page 6](#)

Fri Mar 5

12 noon, Let's Talk Public Policy.

Sat Mar 13

10 a.m., membership meeting
"Womenshare Collective" [Page 5](#)

Tue Mar 16

1 p.m., Book Beat

Tue Apr 6

6:30 p.m., membership meeting
"Economic Security for Women"

Tue Apr 20

1 p.m., Book Beat

April Membership Gathering

On April 6 at 6:30 p.m., Dr.

Mandolin Mull, chair of the

Puri School of Business at

Rockford University, will speak on

"Economic Security for Women" via Zoom.

Watch for more information in your email.

Editor's Note

Can You Help Your Branch?

Our third-quarter co-presidents, Karen Hoffman and Faye Marcus, talk about this on page 3, but it bears repeating.

The branch and its board need volunteers for next year. If you have time you can spare, consider offering to serve on the nominating committee?

Could you help as president or co-president? Past board members are incredibly helpful to newcomers.

And you may be surprised at how little time some roles take.

If you'd like to see how things work, Faye issued an invitation to drop by the Feb. 16 board meeting via Zoom. It starts at 6:30 p.m. Drop her a note to get the link.



Sharon Boehlefeld

On the Cover

Vice President Kamala Harris smiles from her White House webpage in the photo detail on the cover. She broke plenty of glass ceilings when she took her oath of

office before President Joe Biden took his on Jan. 20. See what she's working on at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-harris/>.

Fight Winter Boredom with Us

So much has happened since the beginning of 2021.

We all remember what occurred on Jan. 6. AAUW's CEO, Kim Churches, along with almost two dozen other women's organizations issued a Women's Community Statement on President Trump's Removal. The link to this entire statement was sent on Jan. 10 from our branch and from AAUW-IL or you can go to www.aauw.org.

By the time you read this, the inauguration of the President Biden and Vice -President Harris is history, having taking place Jan. 20. And we move on.

What do we have planned for the next few months for our branch?

First-we will be looking for some new members for our board. A nominating committee is being formed with two board members and one branch member. Are you interested in serving on the board? On the nominating committee?



Karen Hoffman



Faye Marcus

Please contact either one of us.

Several interesting programs are being planned and will continue on zoom.

The Women's March Rockford will not have a women's march as has usually occurred. Yes, COVID has intervened again. But there was to be fun anyway.

Organizers planned an "open house" at the Suffrage Sculpture on Jan. 23. It was a time for women in the community to reflect on how we can advocate for women's issues in 2021 and beyond.

The WMR program included a ZOOM presentation to honor RBG. Retired Judge Rosemary Collins was

the keynote speaker. You can view this on Women's March Rockford Facebook page.

Join Let's Talk Public Policy on Feb. 5. (See page 5.)

Save the date for our next branch program on Feb. 16 at 6:30 p.m. Ellen Rathbone, educator at Severson Dells Nature Center will tell us about all the female naturalists who lived in this area from 1800-1900 Lots to learn. (See page 4.)

Earlier on Feb. 16, Book Beat readers will discuss *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett. (See below.)

If you are a member of AAUW, you will not be bored. There are many more events coming up in March, April and even May. Please read your *Initiative* and weekly AAUW email news.

Stay safe and stay well.

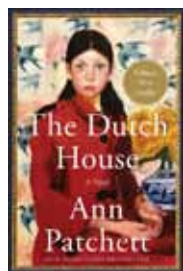
— Karen Hoffman and Faye Marcus
Co-Presidents, Third Quarter

Email us at khoffman01@comcast.net or fe.marcus@att.net.

Interest Groups

Book Beat

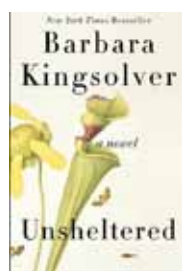
Book Beat Interest Group meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 1 p.m. Currently, we are meeting via Zoom. Everyone is welcome to join



(Photo courtesy Harper Collins)

in by letting Enid Michalowski or Barbara Simon know that you would like to receive the Book Beat email. The books for the next few months are:

Feb. 16 — *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett. Reviewer: Barbara Simon



(Photo courtesy Harper Collins)

March 16 — *Unsheltered* by Barbara Kingsolver. Reviewer: Karen Shifo

April 20 — *Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett. Reviewer: Enid Michalowski

— Enid Michalowski, endiski@yahoo.com; Barbara Simon, bjsimon61114@yahoo.com

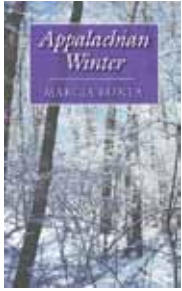


(Photo courtesy Penguin Random House)

February Membership Gathering

Rathbone is 'Out Standing in Her Field'

At 6:30 p.m. on Feb. 16, Severson Dells Naturalist Ellen Rathbone will share stories of several women who were phenomenal biologists, mycologists, ornithologists and more and who either got very little credit for their work or whom history has forgotten.



(Photo courtesy
upittpress.org)

Marcia Myers Bonta has written four seasonal books about the area.

Her talk is based on the books of Marcia Myers Bonta, the author of nine books and over 300 magazine articles.

Join our ZOOM meeting to hear about these women are role models for today's women and girls. The presentation is to last an hour and a half.

For the link for the online meeting, send email to

Karen Hoffman at khoffman01@comcast.net or Faye Marcus at fe.marcus@att.net.



(Photo provided)

An opossum stands on the shoulders of Severson Dells Naturalist Ellen Rathbone.

March Membership Gathering

New Womanshare Collective to be Explained



(Photo by Wallace Chuck from Pexels)

The Womanshare Collective will offer a sewing workshop for female refugees in the area.

Save March 13 at 10 a.m. for a Zoom program featuring "Womanshare Collective."

The new collaboration of Womanspace, Jhoole, Initial Thought, and Rockford Urban Ministries will be located in the former Just Goods building at 201 Seventh St. in Rockford.

Womanspace is a nonprofit focused on empowering women. Jhoole is a fair trade nonprofit empowering women in Maheshwar, India. Initial Thought is a female, minority-owned small business

and Rockford Urban Ministries is a coalition of churches focused on social development.

In addition to selling handmade items from women in India and local women, they will provide programs to support women's entrepreneurship and a sewing program targeting female refugees.

There will be time for questions and time for socializing.

For the link for the online meeting, send email to Karen Hoffman at khoffman01@comcast.net or Faye Marcus at fe.marcus@att.net.

Interest Groups

Public Policy

The next Let's Talk Public Policy meeting will be on Feb. 5.

For a Zoom link, email Faye Marcus at fe.marcus@att.net

What to Know About Public Policy

Political vs Partisan

AAUW is the nation's leading voice promoting equity and education for women and girls since its founding in 1881.

Our members have researched and taken positions on important issues

— educational, social, economic, and **political**.

But we are **non-partisan**. We don't support candidates.

AAUW Values are non-partisan; fact based; and built on integrity, inclusion and intersectionality.

Our focus is on education, economic security, and advocacy.

That is the difference between political (issues) and partisan (party candidates).

AAUW members vote.

Upcoming elections

Primary for City Council

Alderpersons

The primary election will be held in Rockford and Belvidere on Feb. 23.

IN ROCKFORD

Only the 5th, 7th, and 11th wards will have contested Democratic candidates for City Council.

Only the 12th ward will have a contested Republican candidate for City Council.

All wards will have a non-partisan ballot for the city of Rockford. Vote yes or no on a "Proposition to fund road and infrastructure improvements via a sales tax (1% addition) instead of property taxes."

This

request a ballot online or call the Rockford Board of Elections at 815-987-5750.

Do you know what ward you live in?

You can look it up on your voter's card or go to www.voterockford.com. All the information is on that website.

IN BELVIDERE

There will be a Republican primary for Wards 2 and 3 for alderpersons and mayor.

There are no Democratic primaries.

Call the City Clerk for more information.

ELSEWHERE

There are no primary elections in Winnebago County outside of Rockford. The regular consolidated election

AAUW encourages everyone to exercise your right as a citizen of this country and VOTE!

is currently in effect until June 30, 2021. The proposition will extend the sales tax until June 30, 2027.

How do you vote: early, vote by mail, or on election day, Feb. 23

Early voting began on Jan.

14. You may vote early at the Board of Elections on Sixth Street.

You can vote by mail if you

will take place on April 6 in all municipalities. Faye Marcus will get more information your way before that time.

All citizens of the United States should exercise the right to vote. That is the AAUW way!

Please vote.

— Faye Marcus



(Photo by Helena Lopes, Pexels)

Join Us for Virtual Happy Hour Feb. 25

We can't do it in person, but we can do it online. Mark your calendar for Rockford Branch AAUW's first Happy Hour celebration via Zoom.

We've scheduled it for Feb. 25 at 5:30 p.m.

Set up your favorite beverage and snacks, wear your favorite hat and be ready to take part in a little "audience participation" program.

Watch your email for the Zoom link.



(Photos by Barbara Simon)

Suffrage Centennial Sculpture Unveiled

Members of the Rockford Branch of AAUW took part in creating the Women's Suffrage Centennial Sculpture that was finally unveiled on the bike path near the YMCA in Rockford last fall.

COVID slowed progress on the

creation of the sculpture, which was designed by Susan Burton of Marseilles, south of Ottawa.

The three-sided mosaic was installed on Oct. 26 and formally unveiled Oct. 31.

It has already become a part of

women's culture in Rockford, as it was used as the site for Women's March participants to gather on Jan. 23 to show support for issues important to women.

Work continues on benches that will surround the central statue.

AAUW PRIORITIES were the topic of a pre-inauguration letter sent to President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris by Kate Nielson, director of Public Policy and Legal Advocacy for national AAUW. The letter is reprinted on the following pages.



December 17, 2020

Joe Biden
President-Elect
United States of America
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Kamala Harris
Vice President-Elect
United States of America
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris,

On behalf of the over 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), we write to offer our thoughts on executive action that can immediately be taken by your administration and transition team to support the economic security and education of women and girls.

COVID Relief

The pandemic has had an especially devastating impact on women. Essential workers are predominantly women, occupying positions that are largely undervalued and underpaid. From cashiers and food service preparers, to health care workers and child care providers, women account for more than half of all frontline workers. Yet, they go to work without the essential protections they need to remain safe and with the uncertainty that they may not have access to paid leave to care for themselves or their loved ones in times of emergency. As a result, nearly 2.2 million women have left the workforce between February and October and many others are contending with reduced work hours. Women of all races face higher rates of poverty than men and these economic contractions will only widen the poverty gap, especially for Latinas, Black and American Indian or Alaska Native women who are disproportionately represented among women living in poverty.

We urge you to provide the requisite protections to women on whose shoulders our economy depends. Actions to be taken without delay by the administration in coordination with Congress:

- Provide stimulus payments that enable women to weather the economic recession and prevent families from falling further into poverty, including experiencing food and housing insecurity.
- Restore unemployment insurance benefits and ensure relief is tied to labor conditions and economic recovery so workers receive the relief they need as economic conditions warrant.
- Extend the availability of paid sick days and paid family and medical leave to all working people, eliminating exemptions that allow employers to deny benefits to employees.

- Improve access to health care and guarantee no-cost access to COVID-19 treatment and vaccination.
- Reject efforts to provide businesses with immunity from COVID-19-related lawsuits.
- Secure funding for child care consistent with the Child Care is Essential Act that passed the House with bipartisan support.
- Provide states with a substantial infusion of resources to stabilize their education budgets and support their students, particularly for girls of color and other marginalized groups so that they do not bear the brunt of learning loss and discrimination.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

Job creation and economic opportunity are critical issues for women, many of whom continue to struggle with economic insecurity and wage discrimination. Economic security is a foundational aspect of everyday life, and is particularly important for women's ability to support themselves and their families. Women are overrepresented in low-wage jobs – nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers in the United States are women and 24 percent of minimum wage workers are women of color. Women face particular challenges in the workforce, including harassment, discrimination and occupational segregation. The gender pay gap persists such that women working full time still typically make 82 cents on the dollar as compared to men, and women of color experience even wider gaps.

There is much the Biden-Harris administration can do to ensure women's fair treatment in our workplaces, including:

Day 1

- Amend Executive Order 13658 to raise the minimum wage for all workers on federal construction and service contracts to at least \$15 per hour and require federal contractors to pay tipped workers the same minimum wage as any other worker, before tips.
- Announce new White House initiatives to promote equal pay and to close gender and racial wage gaps, such as issuing an executive order that prohibits federal contractors from relying on job applicants' salary history to set pay and requires federal contractors to include salary ranges in job announcements.

First 100 Days

- Require employers to collect and report compensation data by race, ethnicity and gender to the EEOC and OFCCP, including but not limited to reinstatement of the EEO-1 Component 2 pay data collection.
- Create a designated role within the office of the Secretary of Labor to prioritize gender and racial equity issues across departments and programs.
- Require federal contractors to publicly disclose data on gender and race wage gaps and display that information on an easily accessible public website.
- Require that all agency appointees at the Department of Labor and any vacancies among NLRB board members and EEOC commissioners are filled without delay. These appointees

must represent the diversity of our nation's workforce and be fully committed to ensuring and expanding workers' rights under the law.

- Rescind Executive Order 13950, "Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping" which is overly broad and has deterred the delivery of critical diversity training programs.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Since the passage of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which respectively prohibit race and sex discrimination in federally funded education programs, schools have made significant strides in providing equal access to education. Despite these gains, equal does not mean equitable, as barriers remain for women of color and women from low income and underserved communities. Though Title IX protections are in place across the education continuum, two-thirds of college students experience sexual harassment and nearly half of students in grades 7–12 face sexual harassment. The gender divide in STEM programs remains wide, with women still concentrated in areas of study that lead to lower-wage occupations. And women hold nearly two-thirds of all outstanding loans—around \$929 billion—crippling their educational advancement and economic security. COVID-19 has further exacerbate these inequities in our K-12 schools and institutions of higher education and fully revealed the work that remains to provide safer, more inclusive, and culturally responsive institutions that are sufficiently nimble to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

We urge you to take immediate action on the following priorities to break down barriers and ensure more equitable access to education:

Day 1

- Cancel outstanding federal student loan debt that disproportionately impacts women and places an especially acute burden on women of color. Student debt cancellation has the potential to increase the net wealth of women, help reduce the racial wealth gap, boost GDP, reduce unemployment, and provide much-needed stimulus to help women weather the pandemic and the associated recession.
- Suspend enforcement and implementation of the new Title IX Sexual Harassment Rule and issue interim guidance that draws from key portions of the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter and the 2014 Questions and Answers. Interim guidance should: clarify that discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender stereotypes constitute a violation of Title IX; and address new challenges arising from the remote learning environment and the growing rate of retaliatory cross-complaints filed against student survivors by their harassers.

First 100 Days

- Create a White House interagency task force that addresses sexual harassment prevention and response in K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. The task force should take a gender justice approach, with an explicit focus on race, gender, LGBTQ status, disability, national origin and the intersections between their identities, to make students

feel safe and prevent school pushout from harassment, including sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

- Increase appropriations for the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women's (OVW) campus grant program and funding for K-12 schools, in order to fund climate surveys on sexual harassment in schools. The Administration should also reinstate priority areas for discretionary grants at OVW, focusing on institutions with the highest need.
- Restore the Clery Handbook to ensure that schools provide timely and transparent data on the crime on and around college campuses, and amend it as necessary to reflect any new Title IX guidance and rules.
- Increase the size of the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to expand the office's ability to meet its policymaking and enforcement responsibilities. Ensure that OCR has the resources to process complaints in a timely manner and effectively enforce civil rights laws, including by providing technical assistance to recipients.
- Strengthen and expand the Office of Civil Rights' data collection processes to prevent the elimination of data categories and ensure students are not denied equal access to educational opportunity, including access to advanced coursework and AP courses.
- Form a task force to develop an accountability framework for colleges and universities to improve the experiences and outcomes of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Enforce meaningful consequences for underperforming institutions.

CONCLUSION

AAUW stands steadfast in its commitment to improving the lives of women and their families, and is ready to serve as a resource to your administration and transition team as we work on these critical policies together. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202.728.7617 or Leticia Bustillos, Federal Policy Manager, at 202.785.7724 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Kate Nielson
Director of Public Policy & Legal Advocacy